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Royal College of Surgeons of England.

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**The Nubian  
Pathological Collection.**

Presented by the Survey Department of the  
Egyptian Government.

1908.

on view <sup>rd</sup> July 2-3 <sup>rd</sup> from 10-

4<sup>th</sup> - 10 -





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It is not too much to say that the Nubian Collection, shown at the Royal College of Surgeons, England, in connection with the exhibition of specimens added to the Museum since June 1907, represents one of the most important contributions ever made to our knowledge of the history of human disease. There ~~is~~ here shown the injuries, the diseases, the abnormalities and peculiarities of the people who lived in the Valley of the Nile, just beyond the southern confines of Ancient Egypt, from prehistoric until early Christian times—a period of about 5000 years. Even a year ago it seemed scarcely conceivable that there now existed material to form such a Collection.

The Collection was made in the winter season 1907–08, during the survey of that area of the Nile Valley which becomes submerged

when the present level of the Aswan dam is raised 1·5 metres. The survey was of a very complete character; the work was carried out under the Director-General of the Survey Department of the Egyptian Government—Captain H. G. Lyons, F.R.S.; the Archæological part of the Survey was undertaken by Dr. G. A. Reisner, while the Anthropological material was examined *in situ* by Professor Elliot Smith, F.R.S., who was assisted by Dr. Wood Jones. The scientific value of the Collection now shown is enhanced by the altogether exceptional knowledge and care which all involved in the Survey brought to bear on their respective tasks.

The tract of the Nile Valley so far surveyed is one of great historic importance. It lies immediately south of the Pillars of Konosso which mark the frontier of Ancient Egypt. The remains of its past inhabitants have been preserved by the nature of its climate and the care taken of the dead in former times. Although the Survey commenced only in September 1907, yet by April 1908 no fewer than 57 cemeteries had been located and explored, many of them of great extent and often

containing burials which belonged to widely separated periods. The primitive street of the little railway-town of Shellal was found to cross an archaic or predynastic cemetery. The remains were often in a remarkable state of preservation. For instance, in a post-Roman grave Professor Elliot Smith found the abdominal organs of a young woman so well preserved that the adhesions of the appendix to the left side of the pelvis were clearly visible—giving the earliest evidence we have of the condition now described as appendicitis. In another subject (early Christian) were found all the typical lesions of gout—the masses round the joints giving the characteristic reactions of uric acid. Altogether about 9000 bodies were examined, the Collection now shown being made during their examination. No irrefutable evidence has yet been found of either tuberculosis or syphilis; it is now almost certain that the ancient inhabitants of Nubia suffered from neither of these diseases so prevalent in modern times.

The Collection embraces 360 specimens:—77 of these represent anomalies of development—similar to the irregularities which occur in

modern races. The series illustrating fracture and union of bones is very extensive, and the surgical results are apparently as good as are obtained by modern means. The ulna was the bone most frequently broken, owing, says Professor Elliot Smith, to the forearm being held up to ward off blows in a peculiar style of fencing still practised in modern Egypt. The clavicle and femur were also frequently the site of fracture. The form of splints—the earliest known—used for fracture of the forearm in predynastic times is shown by two specimens.

The Collection also contains an extensive series illustrating diseases of bone. The most common were the forms now classed under the generic term of osteo-arthritis. Spondylitis deformans was very common, especially among the predynastic inhabitants.

Besides the pathological series, the Collection also includes two small but interesting sets of specimens illustrating (1) the methods and technique of embalming; (2) the racial characters of the various peoples found during the survey. The oldest — predynastic inhabitants — were



similar in feature and civilization to the Egyptians of the same date; at a later period there was an intermixture of a negro race, shown by a change in the characters of the nose, face, and cranium. At a still later date—in the opening centuries of the Christian Era—another race is found, regarded by Professor Elliot Smith as similar to the present inhabitants of the South-eastern shores of Europe—perhaps Syrian in origin. It is remarkable that these early Christian settlers are distinguished by certain anomalies of structure and peculiarities of disease.

A full account of the Exploration, so far as it is as yet carried out, may be found in the Bulletins i., ii. (1908) of the Archæological Survey of Nubia issued by the Survey Department of the Egyptian Government. Papers by Professor Elliot Smith and Dr. Wood Jones, giving an account of some of their discoveries, may be seen in the British Medical Journal, March 28, 1908.



